

Ashford Borough Council: Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

Notes of a Virtual Meeting of the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group held on Microsoft Teams on **16 September 2022**.

Present:

Cllr. Bartlett (Chairman)
Cllr. N Bell (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Mrs Bell, Blanford, Ledger, Spain, and Sparks.

Also Present:

Cllr Burgess.

In attendance:

Spatial Planning Manager; Team Leaders – Plan Making and Infrastructure; Deputy Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure; Planning Officers – Plan Making and infrastructure; Principal Solicitor - Strategic Development; Member Services Officer.

1 Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1. Apologies had been received from Cllrs Walder and Harman, and from Tracey Butler.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1. A voluntary announcement in respect of Item 4 was made by Cllr Bartlett; he was a member of KALC.
- 2.2 A voluntary announcement in respect of Item 4 was made by Cllr Ledger; he was a member of KALC, and a member of Shadoxhurst Parish Council.
- 2.3 A voluntary announcement in respect of item 7 was made by Cllr Spain, that he lived in the parish of Charing.

3. Notes of the last Meeting

- 3.1 These were not currently completed. It was agreed these could be resolved at the next meeting.

4. Policy SP7 Separation of Settlements

- 4.1 The Spatial Planning Manager gave an outline of the intention of the report, which sought to explain the parameters of policy SP7, regarding measures to avoid the coalescence of adjacent settlements. It was

important to afford consideration to this policy when reviewing the Local Plan, as the green buffer areas had been significantly identified in several recent appeals.

- 4.2 It was noted that there was a hierarchy of open space definition and perhaps any new strategy could be more closely linked to biodiversity considerations.
- 4.3 Members were keen to recognise the successes of settlement separation in recent larger developments such as Chilmington, Singleton and Park Farm, and to use these examples in a positive way to protect community character going forward.
- 4.4 A Member was concerned that green buffer zones could be eroded by large developments arising close to the borough borders. It was noted that it was important to continue to develop active engagement mechanisms and partnership relationships with adjacent councils, feeding into conversations at an early stage and throughout development planning processes. There had been government focus on the delivery of new garden towns to address the shortfall in housing, but this strategy was not addressing the short-term need, and so could not be the only answer. The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure was asked to check with the Programme Officer for the Lenham Heath garden town development with regard to the timetable for comments, and feed back to the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Ward Members.
- 4.5 A Member mentioned a previous paper compiled by KALC and sent to the Planning team in 2020, which could contain useful information to help define settlements and surrounding countryside protection. Officers were asked to retrieve and circulate the KALC document, with any comments, to the Group.

Resolved:

The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group

- **noted the content of the report and the outcome of the appeals referenced;**
- **agreed that Policy SP7 should form part of the review of the Local Plan when it is triggered, to determine whether the Policy requires any revision**

5. New permitted development rights for telecommunications infrastructure

- 5.1 A comprehensive report had been circulated which defined the changes to previous permitted development rights for telecommunication infrastructure following a review in April 2022. Central government sought to provide improvements to nationwide 4G coverage, and investment in the provision of 5G. The intention was to broaden the rights to allow swifter resolution to upgrading existing infrastructure whilst simplifying the process for the installation of new masts.

Resolved:

The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group noted the contents of the report.

6. Review of recent planning appeals

- 6.1 The circulated report was welcomed by Members. It was noted that 80% of recent appeals had been successfully challenged. These successes helped to establish the understanding of the application of policy HOU5 in the countryside ('adjacent or near to' test versus development with a village's confines), form an objective view of landscape character, the avoidance of coalescence of settlements, delineate the Green Corridor and its future potential extensions, and reflect the Inspectorate's understanding of the impact of the Stodmarsh issue for nutrient neutrality consideration.
- 6.2 Discussion took place regarding the difficulty of representing any potential extensions of protected countryside areas on maps. It was suggested a system of zoning similar to flood risk areas could be considered to define these areas more clearly.
- 6.3 A Member commented that parishes had concerns that the matter of connectivity between protected areas via wildlife corridors was being overlooked. The Spatial Planning Manager acknowledged that biodiversity net gain was increasing in prominence in the planning system; other trends such as the diversification of the farming industry may bring additional benefits and address the missing linkage.

Resolved:

The Local Plan & Policy Task Group:

- (i) Noted the contents of the report, and**
- (ii) Agreed to a future Appeals Review report being prepared for discussion at the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group, approximately every 6 months.**

7. Charing Neighbourhood Plan update

- 7.1 The CNP had been in preparation since 2016 and senior Planning Officers had spent a considerable amount of time offering advice. Whilst most of that advice had been taken into account, several key comments had not. It had therefore been considered necessary to bring those to the attention of the Examiner.
- 7.2 The Plan had now been submitted to the Examiner. The Plan had not been brought back to LPPPTG beforehand, due to time constraints. It was noted that the Ward Members had been made aware of the situation, although there had been an oversight in respect of the Member for Charing Heath Ward, which also adjoins the CNP area.

Resolved:

The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group noted the contents of this report, the letter to the CNPSG and Examiner attached at Appendix 1, and copies of all historic communications in response to previous versions of the Plan.

8. Member Tracker

8.1 The Chairman asked for the issue of producing a local list of Heritage Assets to be added to the Tracker.

8.2 The Chairman asked for further clarification of the green buffer zones, for strength and definition, to be added to the Tracker. It was acknowledged this might be influenced by the findings of the Land Mapping Commission in their report due in December 2022.

9. Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting had been arranged for 4 November 2022, at 10am, via Teams.